

## What Hardship Does - Acts 14:21-22 – April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008

- Paul and Barnabas are on the tail end of their first missionary journey having just left Lystra where Paul was stoned and left for dead.
- Some Bible commentators believe this is when Paul died and was caught up into the third heaven as he describes in 2 Corinthians 12.
- What's so absolutely amazing about Paul is that after they try to kill him, he's revived, gets up, and goes right back into the city.
- Some time later, he would write to these same cities in Galatia, about this experience in Lystra, and how it left him scarred for life.

**Galatians 6:17** From now on let no person trouble me [by making it necessary for me to vindicate my apostolic authority and the divine truth of my Gospel], for I bear on my body the [brand] marks of the Lord Jesus [the wounds, scars, and other outward evidence of persecutions--these testify to His ownership of me]! AMP

- The next day, they leave Lystra, and go to Derbe, but then return back to Lystra, Iconium, and then finally to Antioch.
- This first missionary journey has been paved with unspeakable hardship, yet it has seemingly led to the furthering of the gospel.
- I wonder if Luke, by the Holy Spirit, recorded these hardships for us, so as to encourage us with what hardship actually does for us.

- It seems that the Holy Spirit wants us to know that not only does hardship come, but what comes from hardship when it does come.
- I suppose you could say that if it were not for the storms of hardship in life, you wouldn't have the new growth in the Christian's life.
- It's been a while since we've had a rain storm here on the Windward side, and thus everything is getting brown, there's no new growth.

### 1. It wins souls and makes disciples (Verse 21)

21 They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch,

v21 Upon arrival in Derbe, which is no more than about 60 miles from Lystra, they preach the gospel and win a large number of disciples.

- It's certainly possible that those in Derbe had heard of, and were inspired by, Paul's courage after being stoned in Lystra.
- In 16:1 we'll meet a young man named Timothy, who lived with his mother in Lystra. Perhaps God used Paul's hardship to win them.
- People are watching our lives. Actually they're reading the letter of our lives to see if we're real, and if our Christianity works.

**2 Corinthians 3:2-3** 2 You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; 3 clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. NKJV

### 2. It strengthens and encourages (Verse 22a)

22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith.

v22a Paul and Barnabas are now returning to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, and along the way taking the time to visit the disciples.

- We're told that they strengthen and encourage the disciples to remain true to the faith, probably because of what's coming their way.
- This is probably the best thing that they could've done for these believers; tell them the truth about what to expect: hardship and trials.

**Romans 5:1-5** 1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but **we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us,** because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. NIV

**James 1:2-4** 2 **Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.** 4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. NIV

**2 Thessalonians 1:3-4** 3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. 4 **Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.** NIV

### 3. It points us and leads us to heaven (Verse 22b)

"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

v22b His "encouraging" message to them was that "we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."

- Wait a minute! How is that supposed to be encouraging? It reminds us of, and points us to that glorious day when we enter heaven.
- Would to God that the preaching of today would not rob us of the encouragement from refocusing on heaven then, instead of earth now!

How different from so much preaching today, which promises to those who trust Christ material prosperity, good health, and a sunny path through life, and which declares that the lack of those things is evidence of lack of faith. Apostolic preaching took it for granted that tribulation and affliction would be the lot in life of those who love the Lord. In many cultures that is indeed so today. To become an open and committed Christian in such cultures is to court discrimination and official, cultural, social, economic, religious, and domestic displeasure and even death. The religious freedoms we enjoy in Western countries cause us to forget the high price others pay for their faith.

John Phillips "Exploring Acts," Volume 2, p295